

Visible Resistance:

Regulating Homosexuality in Underground Cinema and Emerging Communities Between World War II And Stonewall

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I. Introduction: Legal Censorship and Cold War Paranoia in the 1950s and 1960s

The 1950s and 1960s witnessed the erosion of self-censorship structures within the film industry creating a licensed market in the United States for more frank sexual depiction. At the same time, however, the country's judiciary was determining the constitutional status of obscenity in media. In 1957, the Supreme Court in *Roth v. United States* affirmed that First Amendment protections against legal censorship did not apply to obscenity, defined as material lacking social importance and appealing to the prurient interest of the average person. Thus, while the industry was relinquishing its authority to regulate the sexual content of the cinema, public officials continued the work of film censorship under the standards set out by law.

Chief among films and exhibition practices policed by state and municipal authorities were those of the underground cinema. Such police activity coincided with a larger government campaign against social nonconformity deemed subversive to the cause of anti-communism. Homosexuality played a prominent role in inciting state action in both instances. Many of the films targeted for censorship featured homosexual imagery, while policies and investigations singled out homosexual persons and groups for discrimination and harassment. Linking sexual morality with national security, police sweeps of homosexual persons and images articulated fears about the threat of subversive subcultures to American society.

However, communities organized in resistance to oppressive state action. Filmmakers and exhibitors defied government intimidation, showing banned films, assembling protests, and mounting legal challenges. Lesbians and gays also manifested dissent, forming social networks, picketing government agencies, and confronting state oppression in court.

Key to both movements was a concern with the freedoms of the visible. The underground cinema sought to protect its right to make and show films it considered artistically important and homosexuals struggled with bringing to light the “love that dare not speak its name” in their own lives and social contexts. Each had a stake in the legal censorship of homosexual representations, but differing interests and ethics produced different positions. For the underground, it was a question of autonomy from government control. While homosexuals also sought freedom from state interference, the desire for social acceptance tempered the impulses of radical resistance.

This paper attempts to understand the relationship of homosexual communities before Stonewall to the censorship battles of the film underground in the 1960s. Part II of this paper describes the legal conflicts around the exhibition of Jean Genet’s *Un Chant D’Amour*, Kenneth Anger’s *Scorpio Rising*, and Jack Smith’s *Flaming Creatures*. Part III takes a step back to understand the formation of homosexual organizations and publications in the 1950s leading to a nationwide fight for gay rights in the late 1960s. Part IV concludes the paper with a close examination of the contents of one publication around the time of the film censorship battles, as a case study of the relationship between the movements described in Part II and Part III.

II. Underground Screenings of Homosexuality in the 1960s

The New American Cinema of the 1950s and 1960s brought together filmmakers working outside the conventions and institutions of the Hollywood film industry. The 1960 founding statement of the New American Cinema Group explained the goals and values uniting the stylistically diverse group. The statement begins by noting over “the past three years . . . the spontaneous growth of a new generation of filmmakers” as the “official cinema all over the world is running out of breath.” It then calls for the New American cinema to join together against the dehumanizing forces of “the morally corrupt, aesthetically obsolete, thematically superficial, temperamentally boring . . . Product Film.” Among other axioms addressing alternative modes of film production, distribution, and exhibition, one foundational principle proclaims: “We reject censorship.” One of the tendencies bringing together such an aesthetically disparate group was a shared disdain for legal interference with the distribution and exhibition of films. And among those films suffering interference were those expressing homosexuality.

The films of the openly gay Kenneth Anger provoked repeated police harassment. *Fireworks*, made in 1947, positions Anger as protagonist in a sadomasochistic relationship to a group of sailors. While no sex acts are depicted explicitly, the film uses symbolic proxies, such as the explosion of fireworks and a stream of milk to represent male orgasm. Although a 1959 California court case cleared the film of obscenity charges, it was nonetheless the target of a police raid in San Francisco in 1961 which resulted in the arrest of the theater manager and the confiscation of the film and the theater projector.

More explicit was Anger’s 1963 *Scorpio Rising*, a decidedly homoerotic montage of biker culture, intercut with Christian iconography and dubbed with an ironic pop soundtrack. In 1964, the manager of the Cinema Theater in Los Angeles was arrested for

showing the film on charges of lewd exhibition. The trial included testimony for the defense by media professionals, anthropology professors, and religious leaders and for the prosecution from police and a boy scout leader. Rather than play the entire film for the all-female jury, the prosecutor used blown-up stills of revelers exposing sexual organs during a party sequence. The jury returned a verdict of guilty, overturned on appeal to the California Supreme Court.

Further north in California, Jean Genet's *Un Chant D'Amour* was causing similar legal battles. The 1950 film lyrically represented the homoerotics of prison, replete with shots of prisoners' penises, and circulated mostly through personal collections of rich gay men until its first public exhibition in the United States in 1964 by Jonas Mekas' New York Film-Makers Cooperative (discussed below). Later that year, as part of a fundraising effort on behalf of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, Saul Landau exhibited the film to academic and art house audiences in Santa Barbara, San Francisco, and Berkeley, suffering a police raid during a private hotel room screening and threatened seizure and arrest by the Berkeley Police Department. With support from the ACLU, Landau brought suit against the Berkeley police, calling a roster of academic witnesses to the stand including Susan Sontag. Both the trial court, and the appellate court reviewing the decision, found *Un Chant D'Amour* obscene under state law. On appeal to the United States Supreme Court, Justice Brennan cast the deciding vote opposing the four other liberal Justices with whom he otherwise sided in obscenity cases. The unsigned opinion affirmed the constitutionality of the state statute and the adjudication of the California courts, finding under the standards set out in *Roth v. United States* that *Un Chant D'Amour* had no redeeming social importance and that the predominant appeal of the film as a whole was to prurient interests.

Meanwhile, in New York, Jonas Mekas, accused of having made at one time disparaging comments about homosexuality in underground film, became a martyr for the cause.¹ Co-founder of the New American Cinema Group and, a year later, of the Film-Makers Cooperative, set up in 1961 to implement the Group's manifesto, Mekas used his weekly column, "Movie Journal," in the *Village Voice* to rail against censorship. A 1962 Journal entry declares: "I cannot understand the big fuss our censors are making about Shirley Clarke's film *The Connection*" (Mekas, 53).

Mekas found himself a cause célèbre in Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*, featuring a camp orgy of drug-addled men, women, and transvestites costumed in the theme of the Arabian Nights and playing with each other's bodies. In one 1963 column, Mekas announces: "Jack Smith just finished a great movie. . . Flaming Creatures will not be shown theatrically because our social-moral-etc. guides are sick" (83). In another he includes the film among a list that "all contain homosexual and lesbian elements" in his defense of a "Baudelairean Cinema": "The homosexuality, because of its existence outside the official moral conventions, has unleashed sensitivities and experiences which have been at the bottom of much great poetry since the beginning of humanity" (86). More than simply tolerating the homosexual themes of such films as *Flaming Creatures*, Mekas thus makes the case that homosexuality lends them an essential aesthetic quality

¹ Much of this account of Jonas Mekas and *Flaming Creatures* is drawn from J. Hoberman, *On Jack Smith's Flaming Creatures*, as well as from the republished collection of Mekas' *Village Voice* columns, *Movie Journal*, cited in the text. I also reviewed all issues of the *Village Voice* for 1964 to find additional information on New York City arrests and protests and on the dispute between Mekas and Amos Vogel.

drawing from the depths of the cultural unconscious. In homosexuality Mekas discovers the embodiment of countercensorship.

He put this discovery to the test by premiering *Flaming Creatures* later that year as a midnight movie at the Bleecker Street Cinema, whose ownership promptly cancelled all Underground Midnight showings. The Film-Makers Cooperative relocated to the Grammercy Arts. Frequent police raids in the new location prompted a 1963 "Movie Journal" column lambasting censorship: "The censors . . . are on our backs. They have interfered with our work. . . . They say we are corrupting your morals. . . . [S]haky and suspicious are the morals which can be upset and 'corrupted' by beauty" (93).

Mekas started a war against the censors. He organized an award ceremony for *Flaming Creatures* at the seedy Tivoli Theater. Although the Tivoli cancelled, buckling under pressure from the city's licensing bureau, an undaunted Mekas proceeded with the ceremony outside using the rooftops of cars as a stage. Barbara Rubin, whose own films faced censorship, initiated an occupation of the theater until police arrived to oust the protesters. Mekas then took the crusade to the Belgian film festival he had been invited to judge, organizing special showings of the banned *Flaming Creatures* in his hotel room, threatening to withdraw the entries of other American filmmakers, and, with Rubin, commandeering the projection booth of the festival theater on New Year's Eve. The riot that ensued brought the Belgian Minister of Justice to the theater, on whose face Mekas attempted to project the banned film.

Mekas explained his actions in the first issue of the *Voice* for 1964: "Our actions (by 'our' I mean Barbara Rubins, Paul Adams Sitney, and myself) at Knokke-Le-Zoute were motivated by our feelings against the suppression of any film or any aesthetic expression. During our press conference, as well as on other occasions, we made it clear that we were not fighting for this particular film, but for the principle of free expression" (112). Despite his appreciation for the homosexuality of the Baudelairean Cinema, Mekas makes it clear that it is the general cause of free speech underlying his protest and not the specific qualities of *Flaming Creatures*. He also takes a lesson from his experience in Belgium in further organizing resistance: "It has become very clear, after the experiences at Knokke, that it makes no sense to hide art under a film society membership or other cloak. To look for ways of getting around the law, instead of facing it and provoking it directly, and openly, is dishonest" (112).

Upon return to New York, Mekas confronted a city in preparation for the 1964 World's Fair, which included the arrest of Lenny Bruce on obscenity charges. After the Grammercy Arts was shut down, New American Cinema screenings moved to the New Bowery Theater. On *Flaming Creatures*' second night at the new location, police officers seized the film and arrested manager Ken Jacobs, ticket-taker Florence Karpf, and Mekas himself after he confronted them. A livid column in the following *Voice* accuses the "existing laws" of "driving art underground," asserting: "Art exists on a higher, spiritual, aesthetic, and moral plane. . . . We refuse to accept the authority of the police to pass judgement on what is art and what is not art; what is obscenity and what is not obscenity in art. . . . No legal body can act as an art critic" (127). Echoing the founding statement of the New American Cinema Group, Mekas demands absolute legal autonomy for art.

As part of his crusade, Mekas decided to taunt police with the work of a respected literary figure. He ran continuous half-hour showings of *Un Chant D'Amour* at the

Writers' Stage Theater, which were not interrupted by the police outside. A benefit screening of the film the following week for the *Flaming Creatures* Defense Fund, however, succeeded in provoking police response. Mekas was arrested for projecting the film, once again spending the night in the local jail. His column from that week reports that the arresting officers, who "did not know who Genet was," told Mekas that he "was 'dirtying America' [and] . . . should be shot right here in front of the screen" (129-30). A week later, the New Bowery Theater was padlocked by police for showing *Flaming Creatures* and *Scorpio Rising*.

Inspired by the arrests of Lenny Bruce and Jonas Mekas, a newly formed Committee for Freedom of the Arts organized a protest at Lincoln Center to coincide with the spring opening of the World's Fair. Meanwhile, in the *Village Voice*, Mekas staunchly defended his actions against the critiques of others. Cinema 16 founder Amos Vogel, against whose strict aesthetic standards Mekas had rebelled in forming the Film-Makers Coop open to all films, submitted a special article accusing his rival of an elitist and dogmatic relationship to film culture and criticizing the timing, manner, and film selected by Mekas to lodge his protest ("Flaming Creatures Cannot Carry Freedom's Torch," May 7, 1964: 18). Letters to the editor of the *Voice* the following week expressed strong support for Vogel's position and launched their own attacks on Mekas (May 14, 1964: 4).

The trial took place over the summer. Despite hearing the testimony of such eminent cultural figures as Susan Sontag and Allen Ginsberg, the three-judge panel sitting for the New York Criminal Court sentenced Mekas and Jacobs to sixty days in jail. Karpf received a suspended sentence, and the term of Mekas' and Jacobs' sentence was also suspended. An appeal nonetheless to the United States Supreme Court was dismissed as moot.

Flaming Creatures continued to spark controversy across the country. In 1966, a screening at the University of Texas was broken up, and several months later in January of 1967, students at the University of Michigan protested the Ann Arbor police's confiscation of the film. The municipal judge presiding over the ensuing trial of three student members and the faculty advisor of the Cinema Guild on charges of showing an obscene motion picture called *Flaming Creatures* a "smutty purveyance of filth" and found the defendants guilty. The confiscated print was sent to Senator Strom Thurmond in an attempt to thwart Lyndon Johnson's nomination of Abe Fortas for Chief Justice, the lone justice who had voted to reverse the convictions of Mekas and Jacobs, resulting in a disdainful account of *Flaming Creature's* indecencies in the Congressional Record.

Film scholar P. Adams Sitney offered the world an account of the tribulations of the New American Cinema in "Trouble of the Avant-Garde," published in the spring of 1965 by the international journal, *Censorship*. The article documented the arrests surrounding *Flaming Creatures*, *Un Chant D'Amour* and *Scorpio Rising* in New York and California, as well the de facto censorship effected by the New York city licensing board (responsible for shutting down many of the theaters involved and a frequent target of Mekas' journalistic railings) and laws encouraging film laboratories to destroy questionable material. The article concludes with a statement of the position of the film underground on police intervention: "The New American Cinema Group recognizes the threat of the police, but sees it as an arbitrary threat. Their function is to make and present new films constructed on the dictates of personal vision. So long as the courts

equate them with the pornographers (Mekas was called a ‘two-bit smut pusher’ in court), they are in danger. But that is more the problem of the police than theirs.”

III. Homophile Organizing Before Stonewall

On a fateful Friday night in Greenwich Village during the summer of 1969, as the story goes, the gay liberation movement was born. It was to be a routine raid of a gay bar operating without a license during a mayoral race. The Stonewall Inn attracted a particularly unsavory element to the busy West Village intersection of Sheridan Square: go-go boys, drag queens, and people of color, many of whom migrated west for an evening of fun from the more disreputable East Village.

June 27 had been a sad day for the city’s homosexuals, the day of Judy Garland’s funeral. The Stonewall patrons were already at the mercy of the bar’s connected owners, Mafiosos who routinely paid off the very police conducting the raids. That night the officers did not forget to take their cut, before carting off the bartender, the bouncer, and three drag queens, and insulting the patrons as they tried to push them out of the bar. One confrontational drag queen was beaten to a pulp, while a lesbian put up quite a struggle in resisting her own arrest. The spirit of resistance was in the air; many of the patrons had participated in other civil rights movements of the decade, and did not understand why their own rights were any less important. Within the bar, all sorts of hard loose change started flying at the cops. Outside, an angry crowd gathered throwing cobblestones and beer bottles through the windows. A parking meter was enlisted as a battering ram against the front door, as inside, a flaming trash can thrown to block an exit started a blaze. The confrontation raged for three nights, accompanied by graffiti and shouts calling for Gay Power.²

The Stonewall uprising built not only other civil rights struggles of the 1960s but also on the “homophile” movement begun in the early 1950s in response to the homosexual communities that sprung up in the nation’s cities following World War II. While homosexuality has existed in American history since the colonies, the demographic shifts associated with this country’s participation in the Second World War facilitated the forging of a distinct urban subculture. Accompanying the establishment of the gay bar, of course, was the institution of the gay bar raid. Increased visibility, facilitated by the findings of the Kinsey Reports, raised social concerns about homosexuality. Cold War paranoia quickly conflated homosexuality with communism, and McCarthyite witch hunts and government employment policies singled out homosexuals for persecution while criminal statutes and police investigations focused on purging cities of sexual perversions and subversive associations.

The link between communism and homosexuality was not entirely a paranoid delusion. In 1950, Harry Hay, a committed member of the Communist Party, formed the the Mattachine Society (named after a mysterious medieval order of masked monks) with a small number of other activist-oriented gay men in Los Angeles. Meeting in secret and borrowing from Marxist understandings of class consciousness, the founders of the

² This account of the Stonewall riots, as well as Part III generally, draws heavily on John D’Emilio’s seminal history, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970*. Additional details have been found in Walter L. Williams and Yolanda Retter, eds., *Gay and Lesbian Rights in the United States: A Documentary History*.

Mattachine Society sought to organize “homophiles” with the goal of healthy integration in society. In 1952, Dale Jennings, a co-founder of the organization, was entrapped by an undercover Los Angeles vice squad officer and charged with soliciting to commit a homosexual act. The Mattachine Society, through an ad hoc Citizens Committee to Outlaw Entrapment which would protect its secrecy while publicizing its cause, used the arrest as a test case to challenge police harassment, with Jennings bravely asserting on the stand his sexual orientation but denying any criminal conduct. After a deadlocked jury prompted the DA’s office to drop all charges, news of the victory promoted interest in the Mattachine Society, which soon opened chapters across the country.

The same year as the Dale Jennings case, members of the Mattachine Society, along with members of a social club of gay and lesbian interracial couples, decided to publish a magazine called *ONE*. Filing for incorporation as a California nonprofit and publishing their first issue in 1953, *ONE, Inc.* contested the 1954 seizure of the magazine by the Los Angeles postmaster on the grounds that it was “obscene, lewd, lascivious and filthy.” In fact, far from the soft-core pornography of physique magazines circulating since the 1940s and gaining constitutional protection from postal seizure under a 1962 Supreme Court opinion, *ONE* provided a forum for an emerging militant consciousness envisioned by the Mattachine founders but soon considered too extreme for the direction of the growing Society. Recurring reports detailing police harassment of gay men in cities throughout the U.S were a key feature of the publication, while the cover topic of the seized issue concerned, in large print, the question of “Homosexual Marriage.” The magazine lost in both the federal district and appeals courts, the legal reasoning fixated on poetry that was read as pornographic. However, in 1958, the Supreme Court unanimously reversed, indicating their reasoning in the absence of a formal opinion with a simple citation to *Roth v. United States*.

In 1955, the Mattachine Society began publishing its own journal, the *Mattachine Review*, which took a more cautious and measured stance than *ONE*. With the growth in membership and the increasing prominence of Senator McCarthy, the Mattachine Society had sought to purge itself of any association to communist ideology with a reorganization in leadership and an emphasis on respectability and neutrality. This more conservative iteration allied itself closely with academic and medical experts, who could bring legitimacy to the movement through the unassailability of their credentials and the objectivity of science. Also in 1955, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon formed a small lesbian organization entitled the Daughters of Bilitis, a reference to an erotic poem by Pierre Louys which would carry special meaning for women-in-the-know but would sound like any other women’s lodge to outsiders. The Daughters of Bilitis closely modeled itself after the Mattachine Society, and in 1956 started publishing its own magazine, the *Ladder*, which carefully refrained from advocacy and editorializing. The organization concerned itself with meeting the personal needs of lesbians, many of whom were perceived to be more isolated or still struggling with heterosexual family life and whose issues were not being addressed by the androcentric Mattachine.

Political in-fighting within and among the organizations, limited membership in local chapters due to the rarefied backgrounds and perspectives of the organizers, an almost apologist approach to the integration of homosexuals in society, and a general social climate of fear and persecution encumbered the efficacy of the 50s homophile movement. In the early 1960s, more militant members on the East Coast challenged the

old guard's strategies of attempting to improve homosexuals rather than society, maintaining a "balanced" debate-style approach when taking on contentious issues, and privileging the work of professional experts over the experiences of individuals. Instead, these new voices asserted an uncompromising stance in their philosophy, that the problem was with society and not with gays and lesbians, in their agenda, to demand equality rather than seek legitimacy, and in their methods, eschewing "discretion" in favor of visible resistance.

In 1961, Frank Kameny, a Harvard-educated Georgetown professor who had been discharged from government service because of his sexuality, formed a Mattachine chapter in Washington D.C. committed to a militant civil rights approach, enlisting the legal assistance of the local ACLU chapter and staging protests of government entities in a continued battle against state persecution. In New York, Randy Wicker, drawing from his experience in the civil rights movement as a student in the South, garnered increasing attention from local radio and newspapers, even securing an interview on national television, to raise the profile of the city's gay constituency and promote consciousness of the movement. Inspired by the militancy of Kameny and Wicker, Barbara Gittings, a one-time Northwestern undergrad in the theater department and founder of the New York chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis in 1958, used her position as editor of the *Ladder* from 1962 to 1965 to further lesbian visibility, encourage partisan viewpoints, and challenge scientific authority.

Increasing political divisions, including the divide between those seeking visibility and those clinging to the model of "discretion, weakened the coherence of the movement. In 1961 the Mattachine Society dissolved as a national organization, allowing autonomy for local chapters in big cities but enabling their collapse in less populated areas. The 1965 elections of the New York Mattachine handed control to the more militant faction. On the other hand, Gittings was removed from her editorial position at the *Ladder* in 1966 because of her views. Accompanied by other members who agreed with them, she left the Daughters of Bilitis. Fierce debate in the late 1960s around feminist politics, further polarizing members as to an alliance with straight women, gay men, or neither, marked the dissolution of the Daughters of Bilitis as a national organization and the death of the *Ladder* for lack of funds.

In the meantime, the movement in San Francisco had been taking its own direction. While the East Coast organizers largely eschewed the bars, San Francisco's subculture and movement were more closely aligned. The 1950s beat counterculture centered in North Beach included in its respected ranks openly homosexual literary figures, notably Allen Ginsberg, whose gay-affirming *Howl and Other Poems* gained bestseller status after its distributor, City Lights bookstore owner and respected poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, prevailed against obscenity charges in a 1957 trial. Moreover, the nonconformist philosophy of the beats and the overlapping urban geography of the gay subculture influenced the consciousness of San Francisco's homosexual population while triggering the concerns of the establishment. In 1959, the challenger in the mayoral race accused the acting mayor and his chief of police of allowing San Francisco to become a homosexual haven. The strategy backfired because of a perceived stigmatization of the city, but provoked hardline rhetoric from the reelected administration. Moreover, while officers on trial for extorting payoffs from a gay bar were largely acquitted, the negative

testimony about homosexual subculture prompted even greater harassment in the form of organized raids.

The bars produced their own political activism. Chief among them was the Black Cat, whose owner gained a ruling from the California Supreme Court in 1951 that no state law prohibited homosexuals from a gathering in taverns. The state legislature followed responded with a 1955 statute allowing revocation of licensure for bars serving “sexual perverts,” but the California Supreme Court, in response to a challenge brought by an Oakland bar specified the requirement of indecent conduct. A popular performer at the Black Cat, Jose Sarria, built upon the confrontational politics of his drag act by running for city supervisor in 1961, garnering six thousand votes. The continual struggle against the local police and licensing board prompted several of the city’s gay bars in 1962 to form a Tavern Guild which raised money to offer legal services and information. While the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis predictably kept their distance, the bar culture spawned new homophile organizations, in particular, the Society for Individual Rights, established in 1964 with a strong community orientation and mobilizing an unprecedented constituency. Together, the organizing work of homophile activists and subcultural resistance to state harassment from the San Francisco bar scene set the stage for the national consciousness of gay liberation brought about by Stonewall.

IV. Conclusion: *ONE* Magazine from 1963 to 1965

Publications such as *ONE*, *The Mattachine Review*, and the Daughters of Bilitis were central to the founding of a movement, forging in print (often pseudonymously or in initials) communities of regionally disparate and frequently closeted homosexuals. These magazines toed a fine line along the politics of visibility, seeking to create awareness of homosexual issues but wanting to avoid social censure. A study of the contents of *ONE* Magazine at the time of the embattled underground screenings reveals shifting tensions between the goal of social acceptance and an appreciation of sexual imagery.

Generally, articles appearing from 1963 to 1965 in the more militant of the homophile publications demonstrate a discomfort with censorship of pornography. Commenting on the 1962 vindication of physique magazines from postal seizure, an article in the February 1963 issue entitled “What May one Read” asserts: “Adults who want freedom to select their own reading matter will welcome the Supreme Court’s decision” (11:2, 8). A review in the “Books” section of the October 1963 issue on the scholarly compilation, *Does Pornography Matter*, observes: “[F]ew cultured persons today would be caught publicly espousing either censorship or pornography” (11:10, 27). Less cautiously, an instance of erotic fiction in the April 1964 issue under the title “Steam Daddy” includes the following passage: “The Adonis moved slowly, closed the door to the steam room, and slowly took his towel from its hook. He shook it out and slowly adjusted it around his more than ample endowments. Then he let his eyes travel slowly over to where Marshall stood waiting in appreciation” (12:4, 24).

Discussions of literature in *ONE*, however, often disagreed as to the moral and aesthetic merit of sexual imagery, and its relationship to the movement. One critical review of *Naked Lunch* from the “Books” section of the March 1963 issue dismisses both Burroughs and writers like him: “The ‘beat’ . . . writers, it seems to me, substitute shock value for talent, discipline, and art. . . . It is now an unfortunate fact that in the literary world the three writers most famous for drug addiction are also famous for homosexuality (Cocteau, Genet, and now Burroughs)” (11:3, 27). The reviewer worries that “many minds will make a connection that will be used as one of the attacks on the homophile movement” (27).

Two separate discussions of John Rechy’s *City of Night* mobilize the same concerns, but in different directions based on divergent readings. A review from the “Books” section of the August 1963 laments describes the story as that “of a young male whore . . . who plies his trade across the face of America,” and finds the “theme of this novel, if indeed there is one, . . . in the narrator’s desperate and unsuccessful flight from the recognition of the fact that he does what he does because he is a faggot too” (11:8, 24-25). The reviewer laments that this “will appear to be (and this is no doubt unfortunate) a revelation of the homosexual world,” when, instead, “[t]his book is to a far greater degree the story of degenerate heterosexuals than it is of homosexuals” (25). Arguing that “[t]here is no pornography in this book – or at least it can be only an extremely salacious mind which finds it,” the reviewer proclaims a moral tone to what may be taken on its surface as an immorality tale: “Since this is a very unattractive world which Mr. Rechy describes . . . *City of Night* will have no difficulty, despite its unusual subject, in being considered a very moral book indeed.” In sharp disagreement, the author of “On Life and Art and the Homosexual” in the April 1964 issue finds the same book pornographic, emphasizing despite its pleasures the risk to the movement: “*City of Night* is one of the filthiest books I have ever read. Since my mind is just as dirty as the next guy’s I enjoyed it immensely, but it did very little to advance the homosexual’s standing” (12:4, 8).

No one more than Genet solidified positions on the homophile politics of literature. A December 1963 book review raves: “*Our Lady of the Flowers* is a book without illusions, without promises, without solutions. Not only a fine brain, but a brave one, dared this book” (11:12, 26). In response to such “recent gushings about the writings of Jean Genet,” an editorial preface to the “Books” section of the March 1964 issue explains “the following essay . . . from *Der Kreis*, though written in 1956, seemed more timely today than ever” (12:3, 26). The article, reprinted from a German activist publication, concludes with the following rant:

The pornographic stories and anarchic ideas of Genet, for which even certain homosexual media create a noisy publicity, represent only an evil influence for those who have worked and struggled for years for an ideal, certainly contained in the so solemnly proclaimed Rights of Man, but not recognized by a truly human ‘humanity.’ That situation will not be changed in the near future, thanks now also to the literary ambition and commercial sense (for we should not forget the relation between the latter and fashion) of Monsieur Jean Genet. One cannot even condemn him – one should have pity for him.
(27)

ONE’s editorial decision to reprint the article carries overtones of endorsing its viewpoint, but the publication did not exclude opinions to the contrary. A June 1964

article dedicated to the argument that “[t]he language of love, the whole idea of communication is lost when sex is seen merely as procreation, or as a quest for genital pleasure” (12:6, 5) finds literary and moral value in Genet’s sexual imagery, rehearsing Sartre’s observation that “sex for Genet was a sort of liturgical drama” (7).

In fact, the journal printed angry responses to its editorial intervention in succeeding issues. “Genet: A Defence,” from the “Books” section of June 1964, ties the treatment of Genet to larger debates about censorship, concluding: “Suppression has never been the way to truth and understanding, and I should be sorry to see any suggestion that *ONE* or any other group was trying to cultivate a polite image at the expense of reality, to offer, in short, a writer of genius as a sacrifice in the hope of achieving a factitious co-existence” (12:6, 26). Likewise, the “Letters to the Editor” in July 1964 includes an angry tirade against the “ninny writing for *Der Kreis*,” as well as other readers of the magazine and homosexuals in general: “I was rather struck . . . by the author’s total neglect of the important aspects of Genet’s genius. Genet doesn’t need me to defend him, but I wish someone would write about him from a different angle. Readers of *ONE* – homosexuals in general – discourage me time and again by the narrowness of their views.” (12:7, 30).

The tensions between fighting narrow-minded censorship of materials that had their place in culture and striving to meet standards of good taste that would propel the movement forward color *ONE*’s reception of the trials of the New American Cinema. The “Tangents” section surveying developments around the country notes with concern some of the arrests. The 1964 issue reports: “Los Angeles [vice squad] confiscated as obscene Kenneth Anger’s new film, *Scorpio Rising*, and a week later the Ford Foundation announced it had awarded ten grand to Mr. Anger for his work in art films, including *Scorpio Rising* (12:8, 13). Another item in the same column demonstrates both an aesthetic concern for cinema and an appetite for sexual pleasures: “Haight Theatre, San Francisco, has now opened its doors to the gay crowd. Premier night, July 18, featured the rather poorly edited story of a transvestite titled ‘Glen or Glenda’ followed by the Mr. San Francisco show, which program continued for the following two days. This reporter saw some of the most glorious bodies in the contest that he has ever set eyes upon” (14).

Two reports acknowledge the San Francisco Landau case. The December 1964 “Tangents” only has the following information to disclose: “A half-hour French film, Jean Genet’s *Un Chant D’Amour*, was seized by Frisco VS who said it showed sex between two men and some in the nude” (12:12, 17). The January 1965 issue gives a fuller description:

Saul Landau, a social worker at San Francisco General Hospital was fired, he says, because he sponsored the showing of the Jean Genet movie based on *Our Lady of the Flowers*, “Un Chant D’Amour.” The film was confiscated but charges against the film were dropped. It is reported that when anyone attempted to show the film, the S.F. health officials visited them and found reasons for closing down the building in which the film was shown. (13:1, 19)

While inconsistent with other accounts of the film’s origins and incognizant of Landau’s legal action, the inclusion of this item in the “Tangents” section demonstrates a concern for capricious state interference.

As *ONE* was published in Los Angeles, it is not surprising that it only reported the California cases. Together, these three reports documenting the controversies surrounding *Scorpio Rising* in Los Angeles and *Un Chant D'Amour* in San Francisco focus on the implications for legal censorship. Unwilling or unable to comment directly on their aesthetic merits, the columns instead describe institutional action surrounding the films. Substituting for descriptions of the films are police findings of obscenity, recounted in a skeptical manner but contradicted only by reference to the quality imprimatur of the Ford Foundation in the case of *Scorpio Rising*.

In contrast, a review of *Scorpio Rising* printed twice in the May 1965 issue of *ONE*, once in the "As For Me" forum and again in "Books," dismisses the film aesthetically, although not on the grounds of pornography: "People have stated that all kinds of wild sex take place in it, yet I was unable to see any of it. It is very badly edited" (13:5, 25). The puzzled reviewer attempts to piece together a narrative: "As far as I was able to gather, it's a story about boys who wear chains and leather jackets and spend most of their time either lying in bed or putting on clothes or going to parties or roaring around on their motorcycles, of which they seem inordinately fond" (25). The article acknowledges some virtue in the film's soundtrack: "There are no spoken words in the film, and the sound track consists solely of rock and roll music, which is often employed in a cute and effective manner." Nonetheless, "for all of Mr. Anger's effort, *Scorpio Rising* never gets off the ground." (13:5, 25).

Clearly the dismissal is not on moral grounds. Rather, the reviewer appears confused by the avant-garde strategies of an underground filmmaker. The article insists on a unifying story-line even as it struggles to find one, and, although appreciating innovations in sound, cannot quite come to terms with the experimental aesthetics of the work. The review highlights a divide between homosexuals and cinephiles, and perhaps another reason why the "Tangents" coverage is spotty; although both may challenge state censorship of homosexuality in film, the radical poetics of the underground cinema may frustrate the desires an emerging community to see themselves represented on screen.

Taken as a case study, this examination of *ONE* thus indicates that although the homophile movement may have recognized the relevance of the New American Cinema's battles against the law to their own, the two cannot be conflated. Both movements were fighting against the same government fears of sexual and social nonconformity. Both groups championed civil liberties and protested police harassment. At the same time, each of these emerging subcultures was struggling to define its own identity and place in American society and culture. These struggles, while overlapping temporally, geographically, and politically, need to be understood also according to diverging priorities. For the New American Cinema, what was at stake, above all, was the sanctity of art; for homophile activists of the 1950s and 1960s the imperative concerned the very dignity and integrity of the homosexual's life.

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